



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 165

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, JULY 29, 2019

No. 128

## House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 30, 2019, at 11:30 a.m.

## Senate

MONDAY, JULY 29, 2019

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

### PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, the same yesterday, today, and forever, keep our lawmakers strong, patient, and true. Give them the wisdom to be just, reasonable, and courageous as they do Your will on Earth. Lord, teach them how to conduct themselves in contentious situations, as they seek to glorify Your name. Bless them in all they do.

May they remember Your promise to always be with them, inspiring them to live in harmony, peace, and love. Lord, give them the creativity needed to build a better nation and world.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAWLEY). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 30 seconds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

### PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, there is a bad practice in pharmaceutical pricing called spread pricing. Spread pricing has historically siphoned money from the State Medicaid Programs and given it to pharmacy benefit managers or what we call PBMs. Drug payments and Medicaid should focus on the beneficiary, not the PBMs.

The bipartisan prescription drug legislation I introduced this month with Senator WYDEN bans spread pricing. This will refocus the system on paying for costs associated with prescribing a drug instead of gaming the system to reap a profit at the expense of the taxpayers.

Medicaid funding should go to patients, not to the pockets of healthcare middlemen.

I yield the floor.

### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

### MUELLER REPORT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I welcome all Members back to the Senate for a busy week, but first there is something I need to address.

Over the last several days, I was called unpatriotic, “un-American,” and essentially treasonous by a couple of leftwing pundits on the basis of bold-faced lies. I was accused of “aiding and abetting” the very man I have singled out as an adversary and opposed for

nearly 20 years: Vladimir Putin. This was less than 24 hours after the outraged industrial complex was disappointed yet again by Special Counsel Mueller.

Partisan Democrats and their media allies were crushed a few months ago, when Mueller’s report cleared the President of conspiring with Russia during the 2016 campaign. Now their frantic hyping of the special counsel’s congressional testimony has fallen flat once again, but the conspiracy theories and reckless accusations had to continue. Too many people had invested too much time in the hysterical echo chamber to simply wind it down and join the rest of us in the real world.

### MEDIA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the outraged industrial complex needed a new target, and that is where I come in—MITCH MCCONNELL—the hawkish foreign policy conservative who has spent decades pushing back on Russia every way I can think of, was accused of what amounts to treason by multiple media outlets within a couple of hours.

These absurd smears weren’t thrown out there by anonymous Twitter accounts or fringe bloggers. Oh, no. This modern-day McCarthyism was pushed by big-time outlets. The smear that I am “a Russian asset” ran in the opinion pages of the Washington Post. The accusations that I am “un-American” was broadcast on MSNBC.

This is the state of leftwing politics in 2019. It is like an inflationary crisis but with outrage instead of dollars.

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

S5121

These people have worn out the volume knob so badly that they have nothing left but the most unhinged smears. Welcome to modern-day McCarthyism—McCarthy-like tactics out in the open for everyone to see—in Dana Milbank's column in the Washington Post and on a major cable channel run by NBC.

What started all this? Here was my crime—bless me, for I have sinned: Last week, I stopped Democrats from passing an election law bill through the Senate by unanimous consent, a bill that was so partisan it only received one Republican vote over in the House. My Democratic friends asked for unanimous consent to pass a bill that everyone knows isn't unanimous and never will be unanimous, so I objected.

These theatrical requests happen all the time in the Senate. I promise that nobody involved, including my friend the Democratic leader who made the request, actually thought he would get a Republican Senate to instantly unanimously pass a bill that got one Republican vote over in the House. This kind of objection is a routine occurrence in the Senate. It doesn't make the Republicans traitors or un-American; it makes us policymakers with a different opinion, but the outraged industrial complex doesn't let a little thing like reality get in their way. They saw the perfect opportunity to distort, tell lies, and fuel the flames of partisan hatred, and so they did.

It started with the angry lies on MSNBC. The host lied and said I have dismissed Russia's interference in our 2016 election as "a hoax." Of course, I have never said any such thing—ever. I have spoken extensively and often about Russia's unacceptable interference in 2016. I have constantly discussed all we have been doing to correct the Obama administration's failures to respond more assertively to the Russian threat, including on election security.

So let me make this crystal clear for the hyperventilating hacks who haven't actually followed this issue. Every single Member of the Senate agrees that Russian meddling was real and is real. We all agree that the Federal Government, State governments, and the private sector all have obligations to take this threat seriously and bolster our defenses.

Claims to the contrary—claims that anybody here denies what Russia did on President Obama's watch—are just lies. They are not partisan distortion, not clever spin, just total fabrications.

At least this show is honest about what it offers—and it isn't journalism. Immediately after the host finished his angry string of false claims and calling me "un-American," another panelist chimed in to applaud the remarks, and here is what he said:

We are at war. It's time for the Democrats to wake up. . . . [And] we're not necessarily going to play fair.

"Not necessarily going to play fair"—well, I should say not. Let's re-

member how deep MSNBC waded into the conspiratorial fever swamp over the past 2 years.

They gave airtime to individuals like one guest who has publicly tweeted, among other things, that a former White House adviser was close to being executed for espionage and that Chief Justice Roberts had sent the Marshal of the Supreme Court to the White House to threaten the President. That is utter nonsense. They hosted these kinds of conspiratorial voices.

Just a few days ago, one former host at the network pointed out that "MSNBC built segment after segment, show after show on building anticipation for a big reveal," but then the Mueller report took some of their most unhinged stories right off the table.

Then, just last week, the special counsel's in-person testimony disappointed the political left yet again, so the conspiracy theories needed a new target.

A few hours later came the Washington Post column. It was authored by Dana Milbank, a pundit who spent much of the Obama administration carrying water for its failed foreign policies and excusing President Obama's weakness on Russia. Here is the headline: "Mitch McConnell is a Russian asset"—a shameful smear and based on more lies.

Mr. Milbank repeatedly claims that I have blocked all efforts to raise our defenses against Russian meddling. The truth is, I have championed the coordinated work between Congress, the administration, and the States, which are primarily responsible for our elections, and the Senate has passed several major provisions on this subject this year. I have spoken frequently on the floor about the need to keep up the progress and to stay vigilant. What is more, one of the specific pieces of legislation he claims I have blocked is something I literally have never opposed. His online column links directly to a bill, and it is something I have never opposed.

You would think a columnist leveling these kinds of smears would at least consult a fact checker before accusing an elected official of "aiding and abetting" Vladimir Putin, but, alas, it is not even a competent hit piece, just sloppy work.

Ironically, Mr. Milbank has frequently written pieces lecturing Republicans who he feels has impugned others' patriotism. Back in 2013, the same guy wrote a piece insisting that "in America, a political opponent is not the enemy." In 2015, he criticized "nutters" for questioning the President's patriotism and said that "such beyond-the-pale-rhetoric" had to be thrown out "to have a civilized debate." So you get the picture.

When a liberal politician is being criticized, these leftwing pundits become choir boys calling for civility and decency and high mindedness, but when it is time to smear somebody on the other side, oh, they are delighted to lead the charge.

As recently as 2017, this very columnist wrote:

[L]et's pause to remember: We are all the American people. And we all love our country.

As all of our colleagues know, I have spoken at length about Russia's attack on American democracy. I worked to ensure that Congress sent hundreds of millions of dollars to the States to improve their defenses and applauded the whole-of-government efforts that the administration continues to carry out with States and localities.

Good news may not sell any newspapers, boost ratings, or help with Democratic fundraising, but the facts are the facts. The facts are that this administration has made huge strides—huge—on election security since 2016. They made a noticeable impact in securing the 2018 election and are vigilant and proactive as we head into 2020.

A few weeks ago, every Senator had the opportunity to attend an all-Members classified briefing that I helped to organize detailing the major work that has been underway since 2016. I have been in a lot of classified briefings over the years. It is not exactly common for Members to break out in spontaneous applause, let alone bipartisan applause, but that is exactly what happened in that classified briefing. Behind closed doors, Democrats joined Republicans in applauding the progress made since 2016.

This administration—thanks in large part to our friend and former colleague, DNI Dan Coats, whom I was very sorry to hear is stepping down—has increased and improved our intelligence collection on these threats. It has built better and more functional relationships with State election authorities. It has enlisted more help from the private sector to identify and counter foreign influence campaigns. It has worked more closely with foreign allies and partners who face similar threats from Russia. It has imposed real costs on Russia for its misdeeds and cut down on the ability of Russian intelligence to operate inside our country.

In particular, the Department of Homeland Security has employed special capabilities in all 50 States for detecting malign cyber activity. It has deployed cyber security advisers all across our country. It operates the National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center and supports the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center.

Among its many offerings to the States, DHS offers cyber security assessments, detection and prevention tools, training, and career development for election officials, all free of charge. Using the hundreds of millions of dollars Congress sent to the States, which I proudly voted for and supported, the authorities who actually conduct our elections on the frontlines have gotten themselves better prepared.

This is a long list of significant achievements—achievements that my

Democratic colleagues applauded and cheered behind closed doors when the administration briefed us a few weeks ago. But in public? In public and in front of the cameras, some of my colleagues quickly pivoted right back into hysterical accusations that only fan the flames of this modern-day McCarthyism.

These pundits are lying when they dismiss the work that has been done. They are lying when they insist I have personally blocked actions, which in fact I have championed and the Senate has passed. They are lying when they suggest that either party is against defending our democracy. This work is essential, and it will continue.

Over 2 years ago, I asked Chairman BURR and the Intelligence Committee to take a hard bipartisan look at all aspects of the Russian threat in 2016 and the steps the Obama administration took or failed to take to defend against it. Here was the headline in December 2016 from NBC news: “McConnell Backs Senate Investigations of Russian Hacking.” We wanted a serious, detailed investigation, and not a political sideshow. I am impressed and grateful for the nonpartisan work of the committee staff under the leadership of Chairman BURR and Vice Chairman WARNER. The committee’s reports on the various aspects of the threat are now being released. They will add vital context and analysis and inform on what to do about this ongoing threat.

I am sure all of us will be open to discussing further steps that Congress, the executive branch, the States, and the private sector might take to defend our elections against foreign interference. Any further legislation must be informed by this detailed report and by all the steps the government has already taken.

At the same time, you can be sure that I have spoken out against Democrats’ efforts to seize on the crisis and use it to advance their other long-held partisan goals for the political process. Some of these changes they have sought since long before the 2016 meddling—long before it. So, no, I am not going to let Democrats and their water-carriers in the media use Russia’s attack on our democracy as a Trojan horse for partisan wish list items that would not actually make our elections any safer. I am not going to do that.

My opposition to nationalizing election authorities that properly belong with the States is not news to anybody who has followed my career or knows anything about Congress. Even the New York Times’ editorial board noted over the weekend that while they certainly don’t agree with all my views, they are principles going back decades, and the Times had to admit the Democrats are “playing politics” by introducing legislation with—listen to this—“no chance of passing the Senate [that] serves only to harden partisan divisions.” That is the New York Times this weekend.

So my differences with Democrats on complicated matters of election law are the kind of disagreements we used to be able to have without mainstream media outlets screaming that one side is traitorous. This Congress and this entire country only works when we refuse to let baseless smears displace real debate.

Benjamin Franklin said we have this Republic if we can keep it, and, among other things, keeping our Republic means we can’t let modern-day McCarthyism win.

So here is my commitment: No matter how much they lie and no matter how much they bully, I will not be intimidated. For decades, I have used my Senate seat to stand up to Russia and protect the United States of America. I am proud of my record. I am proud that it is right there in black and white, and liars cannot gaslight it away.

In the 1980s, as a freshman Senator, I proudly stood with President Reagan on missile defense and other aspects of his Soviet policy. While the liberal media was shrieking that the Reagan-Bush foreign policy wouldn’t work, I was honored to support them with my vote and then watch communism crumble.

Then, in the 1990s, I used my place on the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee to sound the alarm when President Clinton was too soft on Russia. Here is the Wall Street Journal on December 1994: “Kentucky Senator, Handed Keys to Foreign Aid, To Be Most Potent Foe of Clinton’s Russia Policy.” Here is what that article said: “But the real challenge to the administration’s policy is [McConnell’s] plan to attach stiff political conditions to that aid. . . . threatening a cutoff unless Russia stops meddling in its neighbor’s affairs.”

Let me say that again. As early as the 1990s, I was on record as laser-focused on Russia’s meddling beyond its borders and making sure the Russians were held accountable.

I ask unanimous consent that the December 13, 1994, article from the Wall Street Journal entitled “Kentucky Senator, Handed Keys to Foreign Aid, To Be Most Potent Foe of Clinton’s Russia Policy” be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From The Wall Street Journal, Dec. 13, 1994]  
KENTUCKY SENATOR, HANDED KEYS TO FOREIGN AID, TO BE MOST POTENT FOE OF CLINTON’S RUSSIA POLICY

(By Carla Anne Robbins)

WASHINGTON—Jesse Helms may breathe more fire, but the comparatively understated Mitch McConnell is the senator who will be the most potent foe of the Clinton administration’s Russia policy.

As new Republican chairman of the key Senate appropriations subcommittee overseeing Russian aid, Sen. McConnell will have his hands on the foreign-aid money levers. He brings to that task a deep mistrust of Russia’s Boris Yeltsin matched only by his

skepticism of Deputy Secretary of State and Russia policy architect Strobe Talbott, whom he describes as “the brightest, best-educated man I’ve ever met [who’s] been most consistently wrong.”

The senator from Kentucky is determined to wean the U.S. from what he dismisses as “Strobe-Talbot-Russia-First(ism).” Just yesterday, Sen. McConnell gave some idea of what he has in mind when he unveiled his plan for overhauling the American foreign-aid system. He pledged to earmark spending on the former Soviet Union to ensure that the lion’s share of a shrinking aid package goes to countries other than Russia.

But the real challenge to the administration’s policy is his plan to attach stiff political conditions to that aid, “linkages” in Cold War parlance, threatening a cutoff unless Russia stops meddling in its neighbors’ affairs.

Sen. McConnell says that while his efforts to “write Russia policy into the foreign-aid bill” have been frustrated until now by a Democratic majority, “I think it’s reasonable to assume that that’s not going to happen this year.” Republican skepticism about Russia will only increase because of Mr. Yeltsin’s decision this week to send tanks into the separatist region of Chechnya.

In a sign of the aggressive role he now intends to play, Sen. McConnell yesterday upstaged both Sen. Helms, who will run the Foreign Relations Committee, and the Clinton administration by releasing his own version of a new foreign-aid budget. He proposed doing away entirely with the Agency for International Development, the nation’s principal foreign-aid agency, and making free-market policies rather than human rights or absolute need the standard for deciding who gets help. “In the past, development assistance has focused on relieving the symptoms of poverty and despair,” he said. “But by any standard, the fact is most poor countries are still poor.”

#### CUTTING BACK ON AID

Overall, Sen. McConnell’s program calls for cutting foreign aid by some 20%, with only the Middle East, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe escaping cuts that deep. Sen. McConnell made clear that the only reason the former Soviet Union would get \$750 million under his plan, just \$100 million less than currently, is his intention to send a significant portion of that money to former Soviet Republics such as Ukraine and Armenia, not to Russia.

A well-described Internationalist who has supported aid to Russia in the past, Mr. McConnell is likely to have great credibility in a Republican-controlled Congress fearful of being tarred isolationist but also deeply skeptical about foreign aid and Messrs. Yeltsin and Talbott.

Mr. McConnell and the Appropriations Committee may also have more real power than Sen. Helms and his Foreign Relations Committee, which is supposed to write foreign-aid bills but hasn’t succeeded in getting one passed since 1986. The job won’t get easier under a divisive figure such as Sen. Helms. That leaves the task of actually parceling out foreign aid to the appropriating committees. Mr. McConnell’s House counterpart, Alabama Rep. Sonny Callahan, who has tried to kill Russia aid before, will be supportive.

#### TASTE OF BATTLES TO COME

The administration got a taste last summer of battles to come with Mr. McConnell. At his urging, the Democratically controlled Senate voted to cut off all U.S. funds to Russia unless its troops pulled out of Estonia by their promised withdrawal date of Aug. 31. The provision was struck in a conference committee, but only after frantic lobbying by administration officials who warned that

brinksmanship would actually harden nationalistic feelings in Moscow and make a withdrawal less likely. The Russians pulled out on time, with both Sen. McConnell and the White House claiming victory.

Mr. Talbott says that he's puzzled by the charges of Russia-firstism. He notes that some 55% of U.S. aid to the former Soviet Union this year will be spent outside of Russia. Ukraine, in particular, will receive about \$200 million, significantly more than the \$150 million earmark proposed earlier this year by Sen. McConnell.

Mr. Talbott also makes no apologies for his enthusiastic support of Russian reform, which he says "unarguably" will make life better for Russia's neighbors and the U.S. "It's not a question of 'what's good for Russia,' but whether Russia continues to develop in a manner that's good for American interests and values and standards of international behavior," he says. "If Russia does continue to develop in that manner it will also be good for the other countries in the region."

Mr. Talbott and others also warn against "mechanistic and punitive linkages," which he says are unlikely to alter specific Russian actions and could end up souring what he describes as a fundamentally sound relationship.

#### REPUBLICAN INTERNATIONALISTS

Despite all the Russia-bashing and Talbott-bashing on Capitol Hill, and a recent bout of U.S.-bashing by Mr. Yeltsin, President Clinton shows no signs of giving up on the Russian leader. The administration's fiscal 1996 foreign-aid request for the former Soviet Union, which goes to Congress next month, will likely be close to this year's \$850 million appropriation, with Russia again receiving about 45% of the total.

To get their package through, officials say they will rely, as they have for the previous two packages, on the support of a large cadre of Republican internationalists including incoming Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Sen. Richard Lugar, and, they hope, Sen. McConnell.

But whether that support is still there is far from certain. Indeed, anti-Russian sentiment has been growing on both sides of the aisle ever since Russian nationalists scored big wins in last December's Parliamentary elections and the Central Intelligence Agency unmasked longtime Russian spy and senior CIA analyst Aldrich Ames. Ongoing quarrels with Moscow over Bosnia and the future of NATO will only feed those doubts in months to come.

Partisan jockeying may only make matters worse. The more President Clinton claims his Russia policy as a success, the more tempting it will be for presidential aspirants such as Mr. Dole to criticize the policy and Mr. Talbott, whose Brahmin manner, first-friend status and unstinting defense of the Russians makes him an easy target. Even Mr. Gingrich, who became a sudden convert to action in Bosnia after Mr. Clinton's recent retreat, may be tempted to switch sides in the Russian debate.

But even the less emotional and less partisan legislators are having serious doubts as well. Sen. Lugar, a longtime champion of Russian aid, says that three years of hard experience show that spending such money effectively in Russia is even harder than voting for it in Washington.

Pointing to a large backlog of appropriated but as yet unspent funds—of the nearly \$2 billion in economic aid promised to Russia from 1992 to 1994, less than \$500 million has so far been spent—Mr. Lugar suggests that the "appropriators may simply ask what's the point of appropriating any more."

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on the other end of the Clinton adminis-

tration, I used hearings to grill Democratic officials who were soft on President Yeltsin and optimistic about President-elect Putin. I didn't share Democrats' faith that Putin would be our friend.

I ask unanimous consent that two excerpts of my committee statement from the April 4, 2000, Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations hearing be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FOREIGN OPERATIONS HEARING ON USAID PROGRAMS—

Excerpts from opening statement of Sen. Mitch McConnell:

"First, we should support immediate and unrestricted access for humanitarian relief works, human rights investigators, and the media. President-elect Putin says he supports the dictatorship of law. Accepting the presence of these organizations will tell us whether the president intends to emphasize dictatorship or the accountability of laws. Based on the UN High Commissioner's trip this week, he's coming up a bit short."

"We should act with clarity, principle, and purpose. If Russia rejects that agenda, it rejects the core freedoms and virtues which define democracies. I see no wisdom in shoring up dictators, even if you do dress them up as democrats."

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, regardless of who was in the White House and regardless of which way the political winds were blowing, I have consistently treated Russia like the threat that it is. Even under a Republican administration, I spoke out when I was afraid the United States wasn't doing enough to stop the erosion of democracy and the rule of law in Russia.

A conference report that I coauthored in December 2003 stated: "The managers remain gravely concerned with the deterioration and systematic dismantling of democracy and the rule of law in Russia." We pushed President Bush's administration—a Republican administration—to do more.

And, of course, I helped lead the charge against the Obama administration's completely feckless Russia policies. President Obama mocked his 2012 opponent for taking Russia too seriously. His administration sought a naive reset with the Kremlin, and for 8 years, I helped to lead the charge against that weakness.

In 2010, I stood with John McCain and Jon Kyl to oppose the New START Treaty, a watered-down placeholder for the sort of tough stance we knew was necessary. As Vladimir Putin was building up his missile arsenal, we even had to push President Obama to commit to deploying capable missile defenses to Europe.

In 2012, I firmly supported sweeping legislation to authorize heavy sanctions following the killing of Sergei Magnitsky in a Russian prison. The Obama administration flinched and tried to tiptoe around our legislation to avoid messing up their charm offensive, but we backed him into a corner,

and the President signed the bill into law.

In 2014, I and other Republicans constantly pressed President Obama to get tougher on Russia with respect to Putin's aggression in Ukraine.

I ask unanimous consent that the news article dated March 4, 2014, entitled "McConnell: Obama's 'Passive' Foreign Policy 'Is A Mistake'" be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[Mar. 5, 2014]

MITCH MCCONNELL: OBAMA'S 'PASSIVE' FOREIGN POLICY: 'IS A MISTAKE'

(By Sabrina Siddiqui)

WASHINGTON—Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) laid into President Barack Obama's grasp of foreign policy Wednesday, although he stopped just short of blaming Obama for the crisis in Ukraine.

In recent days, a growing number of Republicans have directly pointed fingers at Obama over Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggression in Ukraine. GOP Sens. John McCain (Ariz.) and Lindsey Graham (S.C.), as well as Rep. Mike Rogers (Mich.), have all said that the president's attempt to reset U.S.-Soviet relations showed he was both naive and too trusting of Putin.

McConnell was asked during his weekly press conference if he agreed with his Republican colleagues' assessment, to which he responded with a lengthy critique of Obama's overall handling of foreign policy.

"I would put it this way: Can you think of any place in the world where we're better off now than we were when he came to office?" McConnell said, before tracing Obama's global approach to his 2009 address in Cairo, Egypt, which he interpreted as "questioning American exceptionalism and the uniqueness of our own country."

"And he's acted in such a way, almost amounting to passivity in many instances," he continued. "We're not suggesting here that the use of force is appropriate on very many occasions . . . but there's a widespread kind of lack of respect of U.S. opinion."

"It's no wonder that Putin looks at the United States and sort of concludes that no matter what he does, he doesn't pay a price for it," McConnell added.

The Kentucky Republican was pressed again to state whether or not he believed Obama is to blame for Putin's move to heighten Russia's military activity in the Crimean region. Once again, McConnell implied as much without explicitly holding the president responsible.

"I think a passive approach to foreign policy, which basically means not asserting American interests, is a mistake," he said. "Some leaders are going to exercise power [and] will push limits as far as they can if they think that there's no push back."

McConnell added that he was "hard pressed to think of foreign policy successes" under the Obama administration, but nonetheless emphasized the need for Congress to work with the White House on providing economic assistance to the Ukrainian people.

"We need to work with the administration to try to undergird, if you will, reinforce the new administration in Ukraine in every way that we can," he said.

Moments after McConnell spoke, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) came to Obama's defense and pointed to former President George W. Bush's infamous declaration that he had looked into Putin's eyes and seen his soul.

"I've not heard Obama say that. In fact, I've heard Obama speak out very clearly

about that what Putin has done is wrong," Reid said.

He added that it was unclear what the "right wing" Republicans attacking Obama were seeking from the president.

"Did they think that he should do an Iraq move maybe?" Reid said. "I don't understand what they're saying. I think that the cautious direction of the president has been very good in Ukraine."

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, since 2017, I have continued reminding everyone that Putin is not our friend. Russia is going to continue trying to meddle. We need a comprehensive strategy to contest Russian aggression, and alliances like NATO are critical for standing up to our adversaries.

Once more, for good measure, I ask unanimous consent that the news article dated August 15, 2018, entitled "U.S. Senate's top Republican likens Russia to 'old Soviet Union'" be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[August 15, 2018]

US SENATE'S TOP REPUBLICAN LIKENS RUSSIA TO 'OLD SOVIET UNION'

(By Joe Gould)

WASHINGTON—Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., isn't ready to get cozy with Russia, comparing it to "the old Soviet Union" on Tuesday.

A month after the Helsinki summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, at which Trump discredited U.S. intelligence and American policies isolating Moscow, the powerful Senate leader showed he was on a separate track.

"The Russians are not our friends. They try to create problems in every way they can," McConnell said in a news conference at Fort Knox, Kentucky, set up to tout the \$716 billion National Defense Authorization Act that Trump signed into law Monday.

"I think the Russians are acting like the old Soviet Union used to act," McConnell said, pointing to its alleged meddling in U.S. and European elections and its 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. (Louisville-based Spectrum News posted video of the presser.)

Without mentioning it directly, McConnell displayed his differences with Trump and Sen. Rand Paul, the junior senator from Kentucky and an outlier in the Senate when it comes to Moscow. Paul, who visited Russia this month, said the politics in America around the issues are poisoning the chances for cross-Atlantic dialogue.

Trump's openness toward Russia has fueled tensions over the separation of powers. Trump issued a signing statement for the NDAA that claimed some provisions mandating tough action on Russia would actually impinge on the powers of the executive branch.

"This signing statement is troubling because, yet again, the President is showing the world he cannot be trusted when it comes to standing by U.S. commitments and promoting our interests over—his own," the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's ranking member, Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., said in a statement. He called on Trump to "unequivocally stand strong for the United States and our allies and against Kremlin aggression."

The Senate has taken a few bipartisan shots at Trump on Russia, voting overwhelmingly to affirm support of NATO and unanimously to oppose giving the Kremlin

access to U.S. officials. Still, Senate GOP leaders blocked a bipartisan measure to reject Putin's denial of election interference, mandate immediate enactment of sanctions passed by Congress last year and ask Senate committees to hold hearings into the summit's private meeting between Putin and Trump.

On Tuesday, McConnell lauded the NDAA's aid for Fort Knox (home to Army Human Resources Command), its authorized end-strength boost, and its recognition of America's tense relationships with Russia and China.

"It would have been denying reality and in a sense putting our head in the sand not to have a significant increase in military spending," McConnell said, acknowledging Defense Secretary Jim Mattis' advocacy to Trump and Congress for added spending.

"In fact, we gave the Department of Defense exactly what they asked for," McConnell added. The Senate leader also praised Trump's tough stance against China on trade.

"We'd rather not be adversaries, but we don't have a perfect relationship either," McConnell said of Beijing. "The Chinese have become more aggressive on the military side, which has been unusual for them in the past."

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I don't normally take the time to respond to critics in the media when they have no clue what they are talking about, but this modern-day McCarthyism is toxic and damaging because of the way it warps our entire public discourse. Facts matter. Details matter. History matters. And if our Nation is losing its ability to debate public policy without screaming about treason, that really matters.

In the middle of the 20th century, the original McCarthyism hurt America's strength and diminished our standing in the Cold War by dividing us against ourselves and letting lies, innuendo, and baseless accusations crowd out reasonable politics. The frenetic politicized witch hunt distracted from legitimate efforts to contest the Soviet Union, including more sober efforts to root out real Soviet agents in our midsts. In short, McCarthyism did the Russian's work for them. McCarthyism did the work for the Russians.

Now, here we are in 2019. Again, Putin and the Russians seek to provoke fear and division in our country, to undermine faith in our institutions, to exacerbate our political divisions until we tear ourselves apart, and, once again, it seems there are some who blindly take the bait.

American pundits are calling an American official treasonous because of a policy disagreement. If anything is an asset to the Russians, it is disgusting behavior like that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

#### BIPARTISAN BUDGET ACT OF 2019—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 165, H.R. 3877.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 165, H.R. 3877, a bill to amend the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, to establish a congressional budget for fiscal years 2020 and 2021, to temporarily suspend the debt limit, and for other purposes.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. I send a cloture motion to the desk for the motion to proceed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 3877, a bill to amend the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, to establish a congressional budget for fiscal years 2020 and 2021, to temporarily suspend the debt limit, and for other purposes.

Lamar Alexander, Thom Tillis, Martha McSally, John Cornyn, Pat Roberts, Mike Rounds, Susan M. Collins, Tom Cotton, Roy Blunt, Roger F. Wicker, John Thune, Bill Cassidy, Richard Burr, John Barrasso, Rob Portman, Lisa Murkowski, Mitch McConnell.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 402.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Kelly Craft, of Kentucky, to be the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and the Representative of the United States of America in the Security Council of the United Nations.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Kelly Craft, of Kentucky, to be the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and the Representative of the United States of America in the Security Council of the United Nations.

Lamar Alexander, Thom Tillis, Martha McSally, John Cornyn, Pat Roberts, Mike Rounds, Susan M. Collins, Tom Cotton, Roy Blunt, Roger F. Wicker,